

Security Quickie 17 – Lock ‘Em and Leave ‘Em

One of the fastest ways of compromising a system is to simply walk up to an unattended, unlocked workstation or server and access the system. No passwords to break, no equipment to set up, no permissions to circumvent, just start typing and clicking and everything accessible through the open account is yours for the taking. E-mail access, project files, financial records, and personal files could all be easily compromised. In addition, it could take mere seconds for someone to open an anonymous-access service to your machine, or install a backdoor into the system. The attacker could then rifle through your folders, files, and applications at a later time and at their convenience.

Do you lock your house when you leave it? Workstations, as well as servers, have valuable information in them too, just like your house contains your valuables, your records, and your personal items. Do you really want to take the chance that someone might rummage through your stuff when you aren't around? If someone does mess with your files or send an e-mail message to the Governor via your account, the system will record the event as done by you, not by someone else.

One easy way to help keep our network accounts and shares secure is to lock our workstations and servers whenever we leave them. It's a fast and easy method of protecting state resources and your own system integrity. Before leaving your workstation or server (for Windows NT, 2000, and XP systems), just press the <Ctrl>, <Alt>, and keys simultaneously, then hit the Enter key and it's done. Logging back in to the account entails basically the same steps – hit <Ctrl>, <Alt>, , type your name and password, and then hit Enter. (For Win 95/98 systems you can utilize the Office toolbar screen saver icon to initiate the screen saver. By modifying the screen saver settings, you can password protect the screen saver. For other systems contact your departmental support personnel for assistance.)

Protect your workstations and servers and remember to lock them before you leave them.